

# UNITED STATES

→ When did women gain the right to vote? PAGE 257

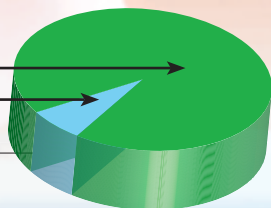
## FACTS & FIGURES

**AREA** 50 States and Washington, D.C.

**LAND** 3,531,905 square miles

**WATER** 264,837 square miles

**TOTAL** 3,796,742 square miles



**POPULATION**  
(JULY 2013 ESTIMATE):  
316,668,567

**CAPITAL:**  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

## LARGEST, HIGHEST, AND OTHER STATISTICS

**Largest state:** Alaska (665,384 square miles)

**Smallest state:** Rhode Island (1,545 square miles)

**Northernmost city:** Barrow, Alaska (71°17' north latitude)

**Southernmost city:** Hilo, Hawaii (19°44' north latitude)

**Easternmost city:** Eastport, Maine (66°59' west longitude)

**Westernmost city:** Adak Station, Alaska (173°11' east longitude)

**Highest settlement:** Tordal Estates, Colorado (10,653 feet)

**Lowest settlement:** Bombay Beach, California (223 feet below sea level)

**Oldest national park:** Yellowstone National Park (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming), 2,219,791 acres, established 1872

**Largest national park:** Wrangell-St. Elias, Alaska (8,323,147 acres)

**Highest mountain:** Mount McKinley (Denali), Alaska (20,320 feet) →

**Lowest point:** Death Valley, California (282 feet below sea level)

**Longest river system:** Mississippi-Missouri-Red Rock (3,710 miles)

**Deepest lake:** Crater Lake, Oregon (1,958 feet)

**Tallest building:** (as of early 2013) Willis Tower, Chicago, Illinois (1,450 feet)

**Tallest structure:** TV tower, Blanchard, North Dakota (2,063 feet)

**Longest bridge span:** Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, New York (4,260 feet)

**Highest bridge:** Royal Gorge, Colorado (1,053 feet above water)

### Did You KNOW?

English is the language most commonly spoken in the United States. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, almost 400 other languages are spoken by some Americans.

# SYMBOLS OF THE UNITED STATES

## THE GREAT SEAL

The Great Seal of the United States shows an American bald eagle with a ribbon in its mouth bearing the Latin words *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one). In its talons are the arrows of war and an olive branch of peace. On the back of the Great Seal is an unfinished pyramid with an eye (the eye of Providence) above it. The seal was approved by Congress on June 20, 1782.

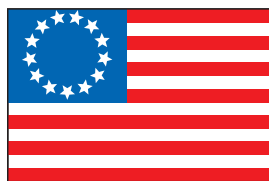
## THE FLAG

The flag of the United States has 50 stars (one for each state) and 13 stripes (one for each of the original 13 states). It is unofficially called the “Stars and Stripes.”

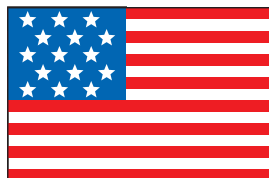
The first U.S. flag was commissioned by the Second Continental Congress in 1777 but did not exist until 1783, after the American Revolution. Historians are not certain who designed the Stars and Stripes. Many different flags are believed to have been used during the American Revolution.

The flag of 1777 was used until 1795. In that year, Congress passed an act ordering that a new flag have 15 stripes, alternate red and white, and 15 stars on a blue field. In 1818, Congress directed that the flag have 13 stripes and that a new star be added for each new state of the Union. The last star was added in 1960 for the state of Hawaii.

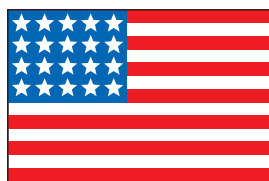
There are many customs for flying the flag and treating it with respect. For example, it should not touch the floor and no other flag should be flown above it, except for the UN flag at UN headquarters. When the flag is raised or lowered, when it passes in a parade, or during the Pledge of Allegiance, people should face it and stand at attention. Those in military uniform should salute. Others should put their right hand over their heart. The flag is flown at half-staff as a sign of mourning.



1777



1795



1818

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

## THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

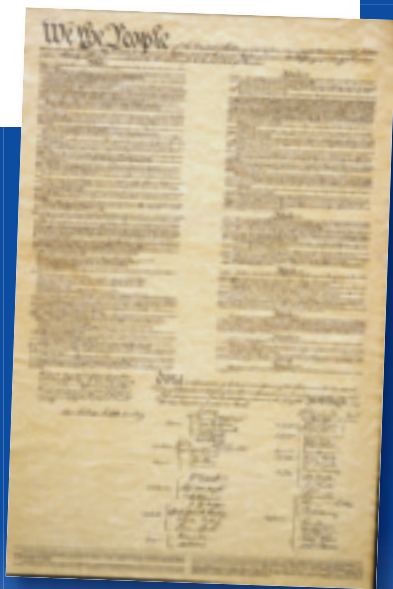
“The Star-Spangled Banner” was a poem written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key after he watched British ships bombard Fort McHenry, Maryland, during the War of 1812. It became the National Anthem by an act of Congress in 1931. The music to “The Star-Spangled Banner” was originally a tune called “Anacreon in Heaven.”

# THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

## The Foundation of American Government

The Constitution is the document that created the present government of the United States. It was written in 1787 and went into effect in 1789. It establishes the three branches of the U.S. government—the legislative (Congress), the executive (headed by the president), and the judicial (the Supreme Court and other federal courts). The first 10 amendments to the Constitution (the **Bill of Rights**) explain the basic rights of all American citizens.

You can find the Constitution online at:  
[www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html)



## The Preamble to the Constitution

The Constitution begins with a short statement called the **Preamble**. The Preamble states that the government of the United States was established by the people.

*"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."*

## THE ARTICLES

The original Constitution contained seven articles. The first three articles of the Constitution establish the three branches of the U.S. government.

**Article 1, Legislative Branch** Creates the Senate and House of Representatives and describes their functions and powers.

**Article 2, Executive Branch** Creates the office of the President and the Electoral College and lists their powers and responsibilities.

**Article 3, Judicial Branch** Creates the Supreme Court and gives Congress the power to create lower courts. The powers of the courts and certain crimes are defined.

**Article 4, The States** Discusses the relationship of the states to one another and to the citizens. Defines the states' powers.

**Article 5, Amending the Constitution** Describes how the Constitution can be amended (changed).

**Article 6, Federal Law** Makes the Constitution the supreme law of the land over state laws and constitutions.

**Article 7, Ratifying the Constitution** Establishes how to ratify (approve) the Constitution.



## AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The writers of the Constitution understood that it might need to be amended, or changed, in the future, but they wanted to be careful and made it hard to change. Article 5 describes how the Constitution can be amended.

In order to take effect, an amendment must be approved by a two-thirds majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It must then be approved (ratified) by three-fourths of the states (38 states). So far, there have been 27 amendments. One of them (the 18th, ratified in 1919) banned the manufacture or sale of liquor. It was canceled by the 21st Amendment, in 1933.

### The Bill of Rights: The First Ten Amendments

The first ten amendments were adopted in 1791 and contain the basic freedoms Americans enjoy as a people. These amendments are known as the Bill of Rights.

- 1** Guarantees freedom of religion, speech, and the press.
- 2** Guarantees the right to have firearms.
- 3** Guarantees that soldiers cannot be lodged in private homes unless the owner agrees.
- 4** Protects people from being searched or having property searched or taken away by the government without reason.
- 5** Protects rights of people on trial for crimes.
- 6** Guarantees people accused of crimes the right to a speedy public trial by jury.
- 7** Guarantees the right to a trial by jury for other kinds of cases.
- 8** Prohibits "cruel and unusual punishments."
- 9** Says specific rights listed in the Constitution do not take away rights that may not be listed.
- 10** Establishes that any powers not given specifically to the federal government belong to states or the people.

## OTHER IMPORTANT AMENDMENTS

- 13 (1865)**: Ends slavery in the United States.
- 14 (1868)**: Bars states from denying rights to citizens; guarantees equal protection under the law for all citizens.
- 15 (1870)**: Guarantees that a person cannot be denied the right to vote because of race or color.
- 19 (1920)**: Gives women the right to vote.
- 22 (1951)**: Limits the president to two four-year terms of office.
- 24 (1964)**: Outlaws the poll tax (a tax people had to pay before they could vote) in federal elections. (The poll tax had been used to keep African Americans in the South from voting.)
- 25 (1967)**: Specifies presidential succession; also gives the president the power to appoint a new vice president if one dies or leaves office during a term.
- 26 (1971)**: Lowers the voting age to 18 from 21.

# THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH



## CONGRESS

Congress is the legislative branch of the federal government. Congress's major responsibility is to pass the laws that govern the country and determine how money collected in taxes is spent. Congress consists of two parts—the Senate and the House of Representatives.

## THE SENATE

The Senate has 100 members, two from each state. The Constitution says that the Senate will have equal representation (the same number of representatives) from each state. Thus, small states have the same number of senators as large states. Senators are elected for six-year terms. There is no limit on the number of terms a senator can serve.

The Senate also has the responsibility of approving people the president appoints for certain jobs: for example, cabinet members and Supreme Court justices. The Senate must approve all treaties by at least a two-thirds vote. It also has the responsibility under the Constitution of putting on trial high-ranking federal officials who have been impeached (accused of wrongdoing) by the House of Representatives.

For more information, see: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

## THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The number of members of the House of Representatives for each state depends on its population according to a recent census. But each state has at least one representative, no matter how small its population. A term lasts two years.

The first House of Representatives in 1789 had 65 members. As the country's population grew, the number of representatives increased. Since 1911, however, the total membership has been kept at 435.

For more information, see: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)



*The Capitol, where Congress meets*

## The House of Representatives, by State

As a result of the 2010 Census, some states gained or lost House members (or “seats”), starting in 2013, because of population changes. The table shows how many seats each state gained or lost.

State	Seats 2013	Seats 2003–2012	Change in Seats	State	Seats 2013	Seats 2003–2012	Change in Seats
Alabama	7	7	0	Montana	1	1	0
Alaska	1	1	0	Nebraska	3	3	0
Arizona	9	8	+1	Nevada	4	3	+1
Arkansas	4	4	0	New Hampshire	2	2	0
California	53	53	0	New Jersey	12	13	-1
Colorado	7	7	0	New Mexico	3	3	0
Connecticut	5	5	0	New York	27	29	-2
Delaware	1	1	0	North Carolina	13	13	0
Florida	27	25	+2	North Dakota	1	1	0
Georgia	14	13	+1	Ohio	16	18	-2
Hawaii	2	2	0	Oklahoma	5	5	0
Idaho	2	2	0	Oregon	5	5	0
Illinois	18	19	-1	Pennsylvania	18	19	-1
Indiana	9	9	0	Rhode Island	2	2	0
Iowa	4	5	-1	South Carolina	7	6	+1
Kansas	4	4	0	South Dakota	1	1	0
Kentucky	6	6	0	Tennessee	9	9	0
Louisiana	6	7	-1	Texas	36	32	+4
Maine	2	2	0	Utah	4	3	+1
Maryland	8	8	0	Vermont	1	1	0
Massachusetts	9	10	-1	Virginia	11	11	0
Michigan	14	15	-1	Washington	10	9	+1
Minnesota	8	8	0	West Virginia	3	3	0
Mississippi	4	4	0	Wisconsin	8	8	0
Missouri	8	9	-1	Wyoming	1	1	0

Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands each has one nonvoting member of the House of Representatives.

## How a Bill Becomes a Law

A proposed law is called a bill. To become a law, a bill must first be approved by both houses, or chambers, of Congress. Most kinds of bills can start in either chamber.

Let's assume that a bill starts in the House of Representatives. It is introduced by one or more members and then assigned to one of the many House committees, where it is studied and possibly changed. The committee may get advice from outside experts and hold public hearings, or meetings, on the proposal. Then the committee votes on the bill. If a majority of the committee members support the bill, it goes to the full House. The House will then debate the bill, perhaps make changes to it, and then vote on the bill. If a majority of the full House votes for the bill, it is approved. It then goes to the Senate, where the process is repeated.

If the two chambers approve different versions of the same bill, usually a committee made up of members from the House and the Senate tries to work out the disagreements and come up with one revised bill. If both chambers of Congress pass this new version, the bill goes to the president. The president can either sign the bill, making it a law, or veto it (turn it down). If the president vetoes the bill, it can still become law if it is passed again by a two-thirds majority in both chambers of Congress.